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SUBJECT: VP HASHIMI CLAIMS POLITICAL TARGETING BY PM

REF: 09 BAGHDAD 1308

Classified By: Amb. Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In his first meeting with Ambassador Hill May 23, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi complained that Prime Minister Maliki is targeting Sunnis Arabs and the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Hashimi claimed that the Council of Representatives' (CoR) anti-corruption interrogation of the Minister of Trade had led to retaliatory GOI attacks on the IIP/Tawafuq (reftel). The VP pointed to the recent arrest of a Diyala Provincial Council member as part of a strategy of retribution, and linked the slower rate of detainee releases and more re-arrests to the same strategy. Hashimi said this would have a chilling effect on reconciliation and participation by Sunnis and other political groups. On elections, Hashimi noted that while the Iraqi people preferred open lists, the big parties would seek closed lists. IIP colleagues said it would take time to pass an election law and would be very complicated. IIP CoR members said that the Independent Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) would be called before the CoR for questioning on June 2. The Iraqis expressed concern about inadequate implementation of the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA), and the participants stressed the need for more educational assistance and exchanges in the context of the SFA. The group discussed using Deputy Prime Minister Rafe Essawi's visit to the U.S. to open dialogue between Iraqi and U.S. universities. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) In addition to the Ambassador, Commanding General Raymond Odierno attended. Iraqis in attendance included IIP CoR members Abd al Karim al Samarraie, Alaa Mekki, and Omar Abd al-Sattar al-Karbouly, and Tawafuq Coalition member Dhafer al-Ani from the Iraqi People's Conference. Senior Advisor to the Vice President Saif Abdul Rahman also attended.

Elections

¶3. (C) When the Ambassador inquired about elections, Hashimi responded that the parties were taking the pulse of the Iraqi people, and said that the Iraqi street seems to prefer open lists. Abd al Karim al-Samarraie, an IIP leader, noted that the big parties prefer closed lists. Alaa Mekki, recalled the complex party negotiations on the provincial elections law, and opined that the national election legislation will take time, and will be difficult to pass. He noted that the Iraqi people are calling for coalitions and identifying candidates, and want change and better services. Mekki also thought that IHEC activities in the previous election had been problematic and noted that the commissioners were scheduled for a parliamentary interrogation on June 2, 2009.

Anti-Corruption Efforts in the CoR

¶4. (C) Hashimi noted that the COR had undertaken an anti-corruption agenda under the leadership of Ayad al-Samarraie, and pointed out the parliamentary interrogation

of the Trade Minister. Both Hashimi and his Tawafuq coalition colleague Dhafer al-Ani claimed, however, that the CoR's anticorruption efforts had resulted in the Prime Minister's targeting of Sunni political leaders. Al -Ani said that there were additional threats of political arrest against other IIP members. He noted that the threats and intimidation would hinder the anti-corruption efforts and silence moderate voices in the political process; extremists would take over. Hashimi requested U.S. intervention with the Prime Minister on this issue.

Political Targeting of Sunnis

¶5. (C) On reconciliation, Hashimi noted that it is necessary to reconcile those in the political process before embracing Qto reconcile those in the political process before embracing outsiders, and raised the issue of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. In addition to questioning the identity of the individual in the video, Hashimi claimed that the video confession linking the IIP with Ba'athists and AQI was part of the Maliki's strategy to discredit IIP leaders and target Sunnis. Samarraie also expressed concern that Maliki was using security files on various political leaders to weaken them and strengthen the Da'wa party. Hashimi claimed that the government was copying Saddam. In the past, said Hashimi, staff judges would issue warrants on demand, try the individuals and then put them into the special jails - all within the confines of this single agency. He also insisted that Maliki has the same agency now in the Counter Terrorism Bureau (CTB). (Note: Many Iraqis have criticized the lack of separation of powers and accountability within security agencies - namely, the Office of the Commander-in-Chief, the Baghdad Brigade, and the

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CounterTerrorism Bureau - which have their own judges and jails, and report directly to the PM. End Note.)

Diyala

¶6. (C) Hashimi complained about the recent arrest of a newly-seated Diyala Provincial Council (PC) member. He said that it was highly unlikely that overnight a legitimately elected official could suddenly became a terrorist. Hashimi related that he had met with a cross-sectarian delegation from the PC, and advised them not to suspend meetings because the members still had a responsibility to their constituents. He further advised them that their communities would hold them responsible for any inaction. Hashimi claimed he wanted to offer them a solution, but had nothing to offer. He said the U.S. must intercede. The VP claimed that there were other warrants in the pipeline, but PC members had no immunity and there was no security in Diyala, since security was run from Baghdad - counter to the (provincial powers) law. He emphasized the need for U.S. engagement, noting that the Diyala situation would discourage future political leaders from running.

Detainees

¶7. (C) When Hashimi inquired about detainees, the CG reviewed the ongoing release process, emphasizing the importance of a safe, secure release process. The Vice President said he was shocked by the continued detentions and re-arrests of detainees. At the Ambassador's inquiry about the recidivism rate, both Odierno and Hashimi concurred that it was between five and 10 per cent, but Hashimi insisted that even this was far below the expected rate. Dhafer al-Ani interjected that the longer detentions increased the rate of recidivism. Odierno confirmed that he expected roughly 5000 detainees to remain in detention for crimes. Hashimi inquired why the release rate went from 1500 detainees per month to 750, to which the CG replied that more difficult cases were requiring more time to resolve. Hashimi alleged that the GOI was

trying to provoke a response; Maliki considered all detainees to be terrorists. He also claimed that all Iraqis, not just Sunnis, were monitoring Maliki's actions. When the Ambassador asked if Hashimi frequently dealt with detainee issues, the VP responded that everyone does, and provided a list of government groups and agencies that received requests and inquiries from families.

SFA and Education

¶ 8. (C) On SFA implementation, Hashimi noted that there was insufficient implementation, and that only a couple of the committees have been established. He claimed the GOI is not interested in follow-up. Hashimi referenced a conversation with former Ambassador Crocker in which Crocker assured him that there would be a special relationship and not necessarily government to government. He claimed that there were many letters and messages between him and the former administration promising the same thing. Hashimi asked the Ambassador to "give us something to offer our constituents," as a positive gesture to help reconcile those resistance groups he claimed to be in contact with. The Ambassador stressed that the SFA is the centerpiece of the U.S.-Iraqi relationship, a framework on which the two countries must build. The new administration wishes to pursue the SFA, but requires concrete ideas.

¶ 9. (C) Mekki was more specific in his request for educational assistance, saying that he was coordinating with GOI and KRG leaders in a parliamentary effort to reform and professionalize national education strategies. His plan included developing a democratic curriculum and educational strategy based on national identity, but he requested support from the Cultural Affairs Office in the Embassy. The Ambassador stated that Secretary Clinton was very interested in such projects, but urged his Iraqi interlocutors to provide concrete ideas on which the U.S. and Iraq could build a strong bilateral relationship. When Hashimi's senior advisor Saif Abdul Rahman noted that U.S. universities were reluctant to come to Iraq, the Ambassador remarked that models exist for post-conflict university engagement and said DPM Rafi Essawi's upcoming visit might be a useful starting point for pursuing ideas in this area.

HILL